

REPORT

Institute of Museum and Library Services Advisory Group Meeting on Library and Information Science Education and Training March 5, 1999

The Library Services and Technology Act of 1996 provides statutory authority for the only Federal grant program that specifically supports library and information science education. Under the statute, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) provides funds for the "education and training of persons in library and information science, particularly in areas of new technology and other critical needs, including graduate fellowships, traineeships, institutes or other programs." Funds are awarded through the National Leadership Grants program, established by IMLS in 1998. The first awards were announced in September 1998.

On March 5, 1999, IMLS invited a group of leaders in library and information science (LIS) to review the results of the first year of funding, to evaluate the revised program guidelines for 1999, and to make recommendations for future policies and priorities. This report is the result of that meeting.

Meeting participants were asked to address the following questions:

- ◆ What kinds of services will libraries need to provide to meet the needs of diverse audiences in the 21st century?
- ◆ How should new librarians be recruited and educated to enable them to provide needed services?
- ◆ On a percentage basis, how should funds be allocated for the education and training of library personnel among the following: recruitment, education of professional staff, training of paraprofessional staff and continuing education for librarians?
- ◆ How can the skills of practicing librarians be updated to enable them to continue to provide effective services?

What kinds of services will libraries need to provide to meet the needs of diverse audiences in the 21st century?

The group identified a range of services and roles that will continue to challenge most libraries. The list, which is not ranked in order of importance, includes:

- 1) Helping library constituents to be effective and discriminating information users;
- 2) Designing and offering services relevant to library users;
- 3) Supporting lifelong learning;
- 4) Serving as community centers;
- 5) Increasing remote access to information and improving document delivery;
- 6) Expanding and capitalizing on cooperative partnerships; and
- 7) Providing persistent access to information through preservation.

Instruction for library users is an important role of libraries, and there may be different applications in different types of libraries. Special libraries, for example, frequently provide intensive individualized services, and may apply the concept differently than public or academic libraries. With the vast amount of information currently available, there is a great need to help individuals learn to think critically about the information and sources they access. Librarians will continue to facilitate access, but they will need to go beyond the role they have assumed in the past and increase their capacity to add value to information by assessing the reliability of information obtained from various sources.

Changing demographics will affect library services of the future. Addressing the needs of aging baby boomers and increasingly diverse populations will require fresh insights into library users' needs and creative approaches to satisfying those needs. Services to traditionally underserved populations will continue to be an important role of public libraries. Libraries of all types will need to provide services to library users with a broad range of skill levels, from those lacking the basic skills to navigate in a sophisticated information society to those possessing advanced research skills. A variety of formats, such as audio, video, and electronic, will be needed in addition to print to satisfy user needs, learning styles and preferences. In addition, as people who are not native English

speakers seek materials in their first languages, libraries will need to provide materials in a range of languages appropriate to each community.

For public libraries, in particular, traditional services will continue to be important. The library will remain an important source of support for lifelong learning. The library will still have relevance as a physical place, and the library building will continue to be a focus for community cultural life and activities. Librarians, however, must become more adept at recognizing the needs of increasingly diverse communities and will need to tailor library services to meet those needs.

The proliferation of distance learning programs will impact library services. Technology affects the concept of customer base for library users and provides the potential for distributed library services that can be made available on a “just in time” basis. Independent students, including those without access to the Internet, must be accommodated.

Preservation is another traditional library service that continues to be important to the profession. Preservation and persistent access issues assume new importance in the context of electronic information. The misperception that a digitized image lasts forever is resulting in the neglect of conservation and preservation efforts as librarians shift their emphasis to digitization of their collections.

Recommendation:

- IMLS should monitor trends affecting library needs and services and promote educational programs that respond to community needs

How should new librarians be recruited and educated to enable them to provide needed services?

Members of the group commented that as the population and its information needs become more diverse, the library profession should promote diversity in its recruiting strategies. Diversity is broadly defined to include background, age, special needs and educational specialties as well as cultural and ethnic heritage. The group discussed the need to sell or market the profession to make it attractive to potential

librarians. Low salaries, particularly among public libraries, are a detriment to the recruitment of library school students and the retention of librarians. Children’s librarians especially are in short supply. Some group members emphasized the importance of attracting people to library schools who are committed to working in libraries and not in some other aspect of the information industry.

The library profession should develop a strategy to educate the public about libraries and what librarians do. The profession has a responsibility to explain the difference between information and knowledge and to inform the public about issues important to librarians, such as privacy and intellectual freedom.

The group discussed the possibility of offering options for undergraduate degrees and other approaches to professional credentialing. Although there were a number of different opinions, the majority felt that IMLS grants should be directed to support the M.L.S. as the basic entry-level credential. There was some discussion of what should constitute the required or preferred background for potential librarians. Participants encouraged IMLS to support recruitment efforts aimed at non-traditional LIS students. To prepare for the challenges of new services, it will be important to coordinate educational opportunities for advanced specializations.

Financial aid plays a crucial role in recruitment of LIS students. Many library school students are making a mid-career switch and continue to work while fulfilling the requirements of the M.L.S. Financial support for part-time students is a necessity. Financial aid is also needed to encourage people to enter LIS doctoral programs to meet the growing need for well-qualified faculty and researchers.

Recommendations:

- IMLS should encourage library school recruitment that is proactive and aggressively targets individuals who may have an interest in libraries but may not recognize the career potential of librarianship.
- IMLS should encourage recruitment programs that focus on high school and

college students, especially those who work in libraries as shelving assistants or as circulation desk assistants.

On a percentage basis, how should funds be allocated for education and training of library personnel among the following: recruitment, education of professional staff, training of paraprofessional staff and continuing education for librarians?

The group recommended that the National Leadership Grant program generally not support training of paraprofessional staff. However, there was recognition of a need to support model programs at the national or regional level for which other funding may not be available. Individual libraries have primary responsibility for training their paraprofessionals and also for maintaining and upgrading the skills of their professional staff. Other organizations, including State Library Agencies, also play roles in continuing education for both degreed librarians and staff without professional degrees. However, IMLS funding might be appropriate for innovative model projects that address training of professional or paraprofessional staff at a national or multi-state level. The majority of funds should be allocated to supporting the education of professional personnel, particularly at the doctoral level to replace retiring LIS faculty. Some funding, perhaps up to 20 percent, should be used for special training programs to advance professional specialization.

Recommendation:

- IMLS's emphasis in educational funding should be on encouraging innovative recruitment and supporting professional preparation, especially at the doctoral level.
- At a lower level, IMLS should support programs for advanced professional specialization.

How can the skills of practicing librarians be updated to enable them to continue to provide effective services?

The group recognized the need to provide a balance between the theoretical and the practical. Entering professionals need time to develop and refine skills. The group discussed possible ways to encourage information exchange, such as

bringing librarians into contact with other information professionals, and mentoring programs to promote interaction between library school students and beginning professionals. Opportunities for continuing education should be customized and multifaceted. Participants also discussed establishing distance learning labs in partnerships between libraries and other institutions.

K-12 education can provide some good models for professional development in schools. Other professions may also have relevant models.

Recommendation:

- In general, IMLS should support efforts to coordinate continuing education efforts rather than individual projects

Summary:

The group identified three levels of priorities for education and training in library and information science. Highest priority was given to exploring models and alternatives to traditional educational approaches and to increasing the pool of PhDs available to replace retiring LIS faculty. Alternative approaches could include, for example, innovative recruitment or distance learning programs to attract part-time or other non-traditional LIS students.

The second level of priorities included changing and expanding targets for recruitment, exploring ways to enhance financial aid for graduate level study, and supporting coordinated and collaborative efforts for updating the skills of practicing librarians.

A third level of priorities involved specialized activities such as: bringing librarians in contact with other professions; focusing on education and long-term learning rather than skills; developing model programs delivered via technology; and coordinating other educational opportunities for advanced specialization, such as certification through professional associations (e.g., Medical Library Association).

Recommendations:

- IMLS should consider funding studies of LIS professional education.
- Priorities in the National Leadership Grant program should not be viewed narrowly as boundaries, and projects should be considered outside the priorities if they are of high quality.
- Programs with the potential for national impact on librarianship should be given preference over distributing grants based on geographic considerations.

List of Participants

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